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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 002051

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR G/TIP, DRL AND EUR/CACEN

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SUBJECT: ARMENIA AS A DESTINATION COUNTRY--GOAM
RESPONDS WELL TO FIRST TIP CASE

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Tracking an alarm received from the "Hope and Help" NGO, the National Security Service (NSS), on November 16, discovered four trafficking victims from Ukraine in one of Yerevan's night-clubs. This is the first clear case of trafficking in which Armenia was the destination country and the government responded both quickly and appropriately. The victims, one of whom is a minor, are currently in the Hope and Help shelter and will return to Ukraine shortly. The Prosecutor General's Office took the lead on this case on November 18 and launched a criminal case on charges of Article 132.2 of the Criminal Code, i.e., Trafficking with aggravating circumstances. End Summary.

IOM/HOPE AND HELP/NSS - EFFECTIVE COOPERATION

2. (SBU) The "Hope and Help" NGO (which implements an INL-funded anti-Trafficking project through IOM including a safe-haven shelter) received an alarm about two Ukrainian victims on November 15 from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Kiev office via IOM's Yerevan office. One of the victims had managed to inform her parents about her situation, and the parents had applied to the IOM-Kiev office. The National Security Service (NSS), whom "Hope and Help" contacted, reacted quickly and the next day, November 16, discovered four (instead of the expected two) Ukrainian victims in a night-club (entertainment complex) called "Khrjit" (Hut) located in the Masis rural area near Yerevan's southern city limits.

VICTIMS' DETAILS

3. (SBU) The victims (ages 16, 19, 23 and 32) were recruited in Kiev by an Armenian, Ashot Hovsepian, who had promised them high earnings working as striptease dancers. Upon arrival, the traffickers took travel documents from the victims and forced them to strip-dance for little or no money and occasionally forced them to have sexual intercourse with their clients. The traffickers imposed exaggerated debts on the victims for travel, clothing and other expenses, which the victims had to repay. The victims had been in Armenia for periods ranging from 20 days to 4 months.

OTHER VICTIMS IN ARMENIA IN THE PAST

4. (SBU) According to "Hope and Help" the victims were under tight control, and went through both psychological and physical pressure (including beatings, rape). According to the victims, some 10-12 other girls, both Ukrainian and Armenian, have been kept in this night club in the same manner in the past. "Hope and Help" intends to send the girls back to Ukraine as soon as possible (tentatively November 27) with IOM-Kiev's funds. One of the girls, however, has decided to stay in Yerevan, as she is a professional dancer and wants to earn money in Armenia. (Note: Despite this fact, she was in the same situation as the others, i.e. she was also victimized. End Note.)

CRIMINAL CASE LAUNCHED UNDER THE PROPER STATUTE

5. (SBU) On November 18, the Prosecutor General's Office launched a criminal case on charges of Article

132 against Ashot Hovsepyan, the recruiter in Ukraine, and Sos Meliksetyan, the night-club owner. Ashot Hovsepyan's location is unknown, Sos Meliksetyan is in Yerevan, although not currently in custody. The Prosecutor's Office confirmed that Armenia was the final destination country of these women. The Prosecutor's Office is actively investigating the case, taking testimony of the victims and questioning the defendant.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) We are pleased with this result so far. Our calls to publicize Armenia's National Action Plan seem to have borne some fruit. The NSS was well aware of IOM and "Hope and Help's" resources and took full advantage of them. We will monitor the actions of the Prosecutor's Office, since it has proven in the past to be the weakest link in Armenia's anti-TIP effort.

17. (SBU) Armenia's capital is full of night-clubs, casinos, and entertainment complexes (with saunas and motels), some of which openly advertise sexual services. Lack of prior legal action, however, has resulted in little public attention to the possibility of trafficking within these facilities. This case may signal a new pattern of trafficking in Armenia, which Post will follow closely.
EVANS